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QUESTIONS have often arisen on why there is a need for a separate rankings for different regions in the world.

It seems to imply that institutions from a particular region do better competing among its own rather than on a world stage.

The *QS World University Rankings* currently includes 729 institutions out of an estimated 20,000 world-wide.

QS head of research Ben Sowter says some regions are less well represented than others in the world rankings.

"These regional exercises enable us to look more deeply at parts of the world where some of the most exciting developments are taking place.

"They allow us to provide comparative information about more universities to more people and enable us to explore richer, context-driven data sets and altogether they enable us to publicly embrace the notion that there is no fixed definition of what is best," he says.

This, he adds, encourages young people to investigate what is actually being measured before taking any ranking at absolute face value when making important life choices.

In fact, Asian universities have gained significant ground on their Western counterparts and could overtake them within two decades.

QS managing director Nunzio Quacquarelli says there are already 17% more Asian universities in the

A regional comparison

Universities need to be continuously gauged to see how they fare against other varsities, and the latest assessment is one that rates only institutions in the region.



Quality: Prof Ghauth says UM is committed to maintaining high performance in the indicators.



Outcomes: Yap believes the National Higher Education Strategic Plan has set the path of excellence for institutions.



Ranking improvement: Sowter says all five research universities have increased their research output.

top 200 of the world university rankings since the recession and the next two decades could see leading universities in the United States and Europe being overtaken.

Explaining further, Sowter says the *QS World University Rankings* appear to be more prophetic than

other exercises of their type.

"Our rankings were the first to question Harvard University's dominance at the top of the table, the ascendancy of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the first to plot the rising influence of Singaporean and Korean institutions.

"The rising influence of Asian institutions can also be seen in other studies," he says.

There is a misconception, he adds, that reputation measures are an inherent cause of inertia in rankings, that a long history is an insurmountable advantage.

"It is our reputation emphasis that reinforces the performance of more young institutions than any other as well as improve the standing of smaller and more specialised institutions," he says.

Sowter believes it is the QS survey indicators that are driving the buzz around Asian universities.

"It is this dynamic context that inspired the development of a separate ranking for Asia and which keeps the work relevant today," he adds.

Academic excellence

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology tops the 2013 *QS University Rankings: Asia* followed by the National University of Singapore and University of Hong Kong in joint second (see table).

Malaysia's five research universities — Universiti Malaysia (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) are in the top 100 of the QS Asia list for the second consecutive year.

UM is the highest ranked at 33, followed by UKM at 57, USM at 61, UTM at 68 and UPM at 72 (see table).

Sowter says the results are very positive for Malaysia with all five research universities improving on their rank from the previous year.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Mary Yap in congratulating the universities, says the National Higher Education Strategic Plan is an important document which

sets the path of excellence for the institutions.

"I believe the universities' success in the rankings is a result of the proper implementation of the strategic plan," she says.

The ranking methodology, Sowter says, is unchanged and was based on academic reputation; employer reputation; student/faculty ratio; papers per faculty; citations per paper; internationalisation as well as inbound and outbound student exchange.

"We rank them independently and we do not allow universities to opt in or out. "We believe this is a responsible approach as otherwise if a university is omitted, the positions of the ones coming after, would be artificially inflated and elevated," he adds.

UKM vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin says the university takes part in rankings to know where it stands in research performance and also in comparison to its peers.

"We use the results to motivate our researchers to improve their performance.

"Over the years I have found that branding helps because everyone looks at rankings," she says.

Newly-appointed Education Ministry secretary-general II Prof Datuk Dr Zaini Ujang believes the improvement of UTM in the rankings was due to an increase in scientific publications.

"We expect a better outcome in future, as a result of the UTM endowment scholarships for top students," said Prof Zaini, formerly the UTM vice-chancellor.

Sowter says four Malaysian institutions rank among the top 10 Asean institutions, more than any other country. This means Malaysian universities are keeping pace with their rivals in one of the most competitive and dynamic regions in the world.

Publications

What would it take for a Malaysian university to be ranked in the top 10?

Sowter explains that the fundamental area of focus is in increasing the number of papers

published in English in influential international journals.

"There is awareness of this need in Malaysia but it still resounds.

"To put things in context, UM, is 20 points adrift of the top 10, but drops over 40 points in the two bibliometric measures alone, relative to the top performer in each," he adds.

UM vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dr Ghauth Jasmon says the university is committed to maintaining high performance in the indicators.

"We recognise that we have much to do in improving both the quantity and quality of our publications," he adds.

The priority is to increase significantly the number of papers published in influential international journals.

He adds that the introduction of the UM Standard Academic Performance Targets and new criteria for key performance indicators and promotions, which put great emphasis on ISI-indexed journals and high impact and reputable international publications, have seen UM taking a lead in this regard.

Prof Ghauth says the university's rise by two places reflects on the continuous improvement in quality resulting from the long standing efforts of management, staff and students.

"Looking closer at the key indicators, I am pleased to note that UM leads in academic reputation, employer reputation and inbound exchange students amongst local universities and beating many regional universities too.

"In faculty areas, our Arts and Humanities, Life Sciences and Medicine, Social Sciences and Management is ranked first in the country," he adds.

Sowter explains that all five research universities have improved their ranking for the papers per faculty indicator, meaning that their research output has increased.

UM and USM are up compared to last year on citations per paper, which means they have increased research productivity while maintaining or improving quality or impact.

UKM, UTM and UPM are down on the citations per faculty indicator compared to last year.

In terms of private higher education, Sowter explains that the role and status of private institutions varies greatly from country to country.

"In some countries, it's almost a dirty word but let's not forget that Harvard University is a private institution. We aim to include any institution that merits inclusion, regardless of status, age or any other classification (in the Asian rankings)," he adds.

Some of the private institutions in Asia are highly competitive. These include Korea's Pohang University of Science and Technology and Yonsei University ranked at seven and 16, followed by Japan's Keio University at 32 and the Philippines' Ateneo de Manila University at 109 among many others.

Look out for rankings of young universities next week.

2013 QS University Rankings Asia: Top 10

2013	2012	Institution	Country
1	1	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Hong Kong
2	2	National University of Singapore	Singapore
2	3	University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
4	4	Seoul National University	Korea
5	6	Peking University	China
6	7	Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology	Korea
7	9	Pohang University of Science and Technology	Korea
7	5	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
9	8	University of Tokyo	Japan
10	10	Kyoto University	Japan
10	17	Nanyang Technological University	Singapore

Source: QS Quacquarelli Symonds 2004-2013 www.topuniversities.com

Malaysian universities in 2013 QS University Rankings: Asia

Institution	2013 rank	2012 rank
Universiti Malaysia	33	35
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	57	58
Universiti Sains Malaysia	61	63
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	68	75
Universiti Putra Malaysia	72	76
International Islamic University Malaysia	151-160	151-160
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak	181-190	161-170
Multimedia University	201-250	191-200
Universiti Teknologi Mara	201-250	201-250
Universiti Teknologi Petronas	201-250	201-250
Universiti Tenaga Nasional	201-250	251-300
Universiti Utara Malaysia	201-250	251-300
Universiti Malaysia Perlis	201-250	-
Limkokwing University of Creative Technology	251-300	251-300
Universiti Malaysia Pahang	251-300	-
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu	251-300	301+
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia	251-300	251-300
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman	251-300	251-300

Source: QS Quacquarelli Symonds 2004-2013 www.topuniversities.com